



# News Release

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

### **437th AIRLIFT WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE**

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### **Send us more turkeys says embassy in Central America**

**CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C.** – When Military members and their families assigned to US embassies in Africa and Central/South America sit down to eat a nice holiday meal, they can give thanks to Charleston Air Force Base because more than likely that's who delivered the food by military airlift.

It is all part of Charleston's Defense Commissary Agency overseas program which flies down food items every month. The 13 members of the base commissary order items submitted by each military member and their family from the respective embassy. The items are picked up by the 437<sup>th</sup> Transportation Squadron and delivered to the 437<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron for shipment. Food items consist of everything from meat, produce to canned goods.

"We work closely with the supply person from each embassy to discuss any discrepancies in our orders. We make sure the 15 to 20 people in each embassy get what they ordered," said Charleston commissary store director Eddie Williams.

Military members and their families in the embassies do their shopping by looking through a monthly DeCa catalog that has prices and item descriptions. Commissary officials estimate more \$1.2 million of food items were shipped last year.

"Any embassy can order items that we carry. We receive their consolidated orders by email and we go and order the items," Williams said.

“It’s just like shopping for groceries on the Internet and it is a tremendous quality of life program. We usually get their orders about 14 days before the scheduled airlift dates, but only fill the orders once a month,” said Elizabeth Mazell, lead overseas support technician.

Louis Stille, a warehouse supervisor in the commissary, says that they breakdown all the orders by country. “We mark each item with an account number so they don’t get mixed up. All the items are placed in cardboard boxes. Frozen and perishable items are placed in polar containers and we add dry ice, ensuring the items remain cold for 72 hours.”

The orders are usually sent out on Sundays and Tuesdays depending on the country and each embassy order can range from 2,000 to 12,000 pounds of groceries per country. “When the items get in country, they have people check over the order to make sure they received everything that was ordered,” Stille said.

The 450 men and women of the 437 APS live up to its motto of excellence in airlift by unloading the trucks, placing the items on 463L pallets, weighing them and storing the perishable food items in massive refrigerators until they are loaded on C-17s or other aircraft the next day.

The process to check the paperwork, build the pallets, weigh them and get the cargo ready for airlift can take about 4 to 5 hours for a full load. “It gets pretty interesting when the aircraft breaks down or there are delays. When that happens, even if it is only for a day, we have to reopen all the perishable items and check the ice. We often have to replace the dry ice when there are delays and it takes awhile to rebuild the pallets,” Shallenberger said. “Re-icing a full shipment with four people takes about five hours to complete.”

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**NEWS MEDIA ADVISORY:** *For interviews, information or photos to accompany the story, contact Lt. Col. Ed Memi at 963-5608.*